

Earth Day 2003



Congresswoman
Lois Capps

23RD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Update on the Environment



Nowhere is it more appropriate to observe Earth Day than here on the Central Coast, one of the most beautiful places in America. Earth Day holds particular significance for our community, because the concept was conceived after Senator Gaylord Nelson visited Santa Barbara to witness the devastating effects of the 1969 oil spill.

We have come a long way in the past thirty-four years. Our oceans, rivers, and lakes are cleaner, and our parks and our protected open spaces are more vast. Yet much remains to be done. We need to increase our commitment to renewable and efficient energy, to keeping our air and drinking water clean and safe, and to protecting our natural resources from excessive development.

As we commemorate Earth Day, I want to take this opportunity to underscore my commitment to protecting our natural resources and inform you of my most recent actions in Congress.

Cleaning Our Water & Air

I recently introduced the Safe Drinking Water Act, a bill to help clean up drinking water contaminated by MTBE – a gasoline additive that has leaked out of underground storage tanks. Currently, there are over 200 sites on the Central Coast polluted by MTBE. The federal Leaking Underground Storage Tank Fund, which comes from gas taxes and currently has a balance of more than \$2 BILLION, is supposed to help clean up sites like these. But the Bush Administration only wants to spend \$73 million to clean up leaking tanks, even though just one site can easily cost \$100 million or more. Congress must increase the federal funding to clean up these types of polluted sites.

I am also deeply concerned that the Administration's budget fails to provide adequate funding for clean water programs. I have supported increases for the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Revolving Funds, which ensure public drinking water and our nation's lakes, rivers and other bodies of water are safe from pollution. And the Administration must end its misguided efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act program that seeks to clean up old and dirty power plants.

Stopping Offshore Oil Drilling

As you probably know, our efforts to stop the Bush Administration's push for more oil drilling off the Central Coast have been very successful. Earlier this month, the Administration announced its decision to stop appealing Federal Court rulings giving California a veto over development of the 36 oil and gas leases off our coast. I led 30 members of the House of Representatives and both California Senators in filing a legal brief in support of California's position. And my amendment last summer put the House on record for the first time in opposition to new drilling off California. This is a huge victory for those of us who have worked for years to protect our environment and coastal economy from new drilling.

I recently passed an amendment to the Energy bill to protect U.S. coastlines from new oil drilling. My amendment removed a provision in the bill that would have weakened the longstanding prohibition against new oil and gas drilling in environmentally sensitive areas off nearly every coastal state. Here on the Central Coast we know the damage that a single spill can cause to our marine and coastal environment. And our local economy – so dependent on tourism and our beautiful coastline – is inextricably linked to the health of our oceans.

Enhancing Our Coastal Communities and Oceans

I earlier this year, I introduced the Stop Oil Spills (S.O.S.) Act, a bill to speed up the phase-out of dangerous single-hulled oil tankers, replace them with safer ships, and create a 100-mile coastal safety zone. In January, the *Ventura County Star* reported that a damaged tanker carrying over one million gallons of crude oil traveled from Long Beach to San Francisco after an anchor had pierced a hole in its bow. Recent events, like this and the sinking of the HMS *Prestige* off the Spanish coast, illustrate the danger of single-hull ships laden with toxic cargo. Enactment of the S.O.S. Act would greatly reduce the potential that a catastrophic oil spill would devastate our environment and economy.

I am pleased that the National Park Service has released the draft of the important Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study, despite intense pressure to shelve the effort. All of us who live on the Central Coast understand the value of preserving open space and how important agriculture is to achieving that goal. The study has yielded some very tangible results, including officially recognizing that Gaviota is an area of national significance and that action must be taken to ensure it is not overrun with development. The Park Service has called on our community to take such action and ensure Gaviota is passed onto future generations intact. While I have always stated my preference for a locally based preservation strategy, the federal government can offer legitimate and effective alternatives should these efforts not come to fruition. I encourage the local groups that have been working together on local preservation options to finish the hard work that has been underway in response to the Park Service study.

I have actively sought increased funding to support our local gems, the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and its valuable local education and conservation programs, and the Morro Bay National Estuary. And I continue to support critical water quality monitoring programs to ensure that our beaches are clean and safe.

Protecting Our Public Lands

I am leading Congressional opposition to the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to open up additional lands in the Los Padres National Forest to new oil and gas exploration. The opening of these spectacular, unspoiled lands to drilling threatens one of California's most pristine and wild places. New oil and gas development could damage the forest and its fragile habitat and destroy important unexplored archeological sites.

I am also working with Senator Boxer on legislation to protect California's remaining wild places. Many things are unique to the Central Coast, one of which is the opportunity for recreation and solitude. The places we seek to protect would provide opportunities for camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, and horseback riding. Unfortunately, all of these wonderful activities are at risk by the continual threat of extractive industries and road development. This legislation is an excellent step toward protecting these unique lands.

Working with county officials and environmental groups, I am seeking federal funds to complete the Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Project. The massive build-up of sediment behind the dam is causing numerous environmental problems, including beach erosion and threats to steelhead trout. This funding will help ensure that the complete removal of the dam is carried out in a safe and environmentally sound manner. Removing Matilija will yield enormous ecological and economic benefits to all of Ventura County.

One of the greatest treasures of the San Luis Obispo County coast is the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse. Last year, we got the Coast Guard to turn over the lighthouse to the Bureau of Land Management, which will work with local groups to repair, maintain and open the lighthouse to visitors. I will continue to seek federal funds to finish this critical local project which both preserves an important part of California's nautical history and safeguards our natural environment. We all can look forward to the day when Central Coast school children can take a field trip to watch whales and other sea life in their natural habitat and learn about the importance of preserving our coastal resources.

How to Contact Congresswoman Capps

1707 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515-0522
(202) 225-3601

141 South A Street, Suite 204
Oxnard, CA 93030
(805) 385-3440

1216 State Street, Suite 403
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 730-1710

1411 Marsh Street, Suite 205
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
(805) 546-8348

E-mail web address:

www.house.gov/writerep

Web site: www.house.gov/capps

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

OFFICIAL BUSINESS



M.C.
PRSR STD